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**PURITY OF COMMUNION,
ITS IMPORTANCE,**

AND

THE BEST MEANS OF PROMOTING IT:

AN ESSAY,

WRITTEN AT THE REQUEST OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF CANADA,
AND READ TO THE ASSEMBLY, JUNE 17TH, 1854,

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BY

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PURITY OF COMMUNION.

"My Kingdom is not of this world," was the profound declaration of Jesus Christ, when about to be offered up in sacrifice. He was a King; but his dominion was spiritual; and though he came to establish it in the world, it was not to be of the world. Its subjects were to be men and women of regenerate hearts, whose position is described by an Apostle—"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come:"—and the churches of which it is composed were to be assemblages of these subjects, devoted to the service of the Lord. The writer has been requested to bring out these points in an Essay, to be read on this occasion; its subject being:—

"Purity of Communion, its importance and the best means of promoting it."

The first point claiming attention is: *What do we mean by purity of communion?* If it be supposed that they who maintain the importance of this matter, pretend to have churches that are free from sin, and that every one who approaches the table of the Lord must be a perfect character; all we can say is that the supposition is a mistake: we make no such pretensions. If further it be imagined that with our utmost regard to our principles we do in fact secure or suppose that we secure Churches, *all* whose members are undoubted Christians, there is in this great misapprehension, for it would obviously involve on the part of the receiving agents, whoever they might be, a power of heart searching to which we lay no claim; and it would further involve the impossibility of self deception on the part of candidates for church membership, than which few things can be more inconsistent alike with Scripture and with fact. Still further, should it be supposed that our meaning is to exclude all from fellowship as "outside barbarians" who do not pronounce our Shibboleth and agree with us in all points of dogma, of symbolical institution, or of ecclesiastical polity, there would be still grievous mistake; for these points however relatively important, are not to be held as essential to the validity of a christian profession, nor are they of the essence of a godly character.

Our meaning will be more correctly ascertained by a reference to the New Testament. There, among the earliest records of the kingdom after the day of pentecost, we read, "and the Lord added to the Church daily the saved." That work was conspicuously and essentially the *Lord's*; though his servants laboured zealously for its accomplishment. The additions were to an *assembly*. It was neither to a build-

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ing, nor a hierarchy, nor a clergy, nor a national or provincial organization, but plainly to an assembly in a single city, the company of believers, to which the additions were made. These additions were moreover *numerous and frequent*. They were most blessed times in the history of the Kingdom when DAILY there were added to the assembly of believers, the saved! Notwithstanding the opposition of the authorities, and the hostile prejudices of the Jewish people, converts were multiplied and the new covenant Zion rejoiced! But the point of special concernment now is: *What was the character of the persons added?* "The Lord added (adjoined) the saved, day by day to the Church"; so would we literally translate the passage. *And who were the saved?* In reply we find the following statements and descriptions: The name *Jesus* was given to him who was "made of woman, made under the law," the reason being "he shall *save* his people from their sins." We are told that "He came to seek and to *save* those that were lost." The commission given to the apostles to preach the gospel to every creature had appended to it the promise, "he that believeth shall be *saved*." Hence we are informed, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to *save* them that believe," and it is declared with reiteration "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be *saved*." Did the jailer ask what must I do to be *saved*? The reply was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be *saved*." When the boon was received, the blessing was celebrated in strains of joy and humility descriptive of its nature: "By grace ye are *saved* through faith." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but, according to his mercy he *saved* us." "God hath *saved* us, and called us with a holy calling not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace." "We are *saved* by hope."

Now all these scripture statements and others that might be quoted, indicate that the parties designated the saved, were "a peculiar people," "a chosen generation," "new creatures in Christ Jesus." They had undergone a change in *state*, for they were justified by the precious blood of Christ through faith, and were reconciled to God. They had undergone a *change of character* for "old things had passed away and all things had become new." It was for this cause that people took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus; and because of the contrast they presented, "of the rest durst no man join himself unto them." It was not a matter of baptism or of any other ritual ser-

vice; it was an inward spiritual change expressed in an outward holy life. They are described as "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus." Their "work of faith and labour of love" are spoken of. They are said to be "changed into the same image (that of the Lord) from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord." This was their profession, borne out by corresponding practice. They were not *all* really what they *professed* to be. Some of them afterwards "made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience." Others went out from the company, thereby declaring that though nominally so they were never really of it. Others went to the door of the Judge at last and exclaimed, "Lord we have ate and drank in thy name: in thy name have we cast out devils and in thy name done many wonderful works;" to whom he who never takes back his word answers, "I never knew you." But they all made a credible profession, and afforded credible evidence of true discipleship: they first gave themselves in solemn profession of allegiance to the Lord, and then to the Church.

It is maintained that this primitive practice is binding, and that only such have any claim to be Church members. The grounds are:

1. *The design of Christ in the institution of the Churches.*

It may be regarded as *twofold*, both *conservative* and *aggressive*. The Churches are schools of training; gardens for culture; in other words they are designed to nourish the spiritual strength of disciples, and to train them for present efficiency and for future glory. The exposition of divine truth,—the solemn worship of the sanctuary,—and the symbolical ordinances to be observed by the Churches, are designed to increase the knowledge and augment the piety of their members.

But in order to this issue *their possession of vital piety is essential*. The state of "death in trespasses and sins" cannot be cultivated into increase of spiritual life. There must be life itself in order to growth. Thorns and briars may be ever so much nurtured, they will neither be graceful nor useful. They need uprooting. They must be superseded by the "fir tree and the myrtle tree" whose growth under-culture will promote the beauty of the scene and add to the honour of the husbandman. In other words a man must be actually a Christian before he can grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You cannot train a slave into an effective free labourer. First give him his liberty, and then the freeman

may be trained for the designed position and work. The source of actual character in its varied manifestations lies deep in the moral nature of a man, just as the source of many streams is found in some bubbling fountain, issuing from a hidden cave. So long as that moral nature is untransformed by the Spirit of God through the Gospel, it is vain to expect a holy character. Your attempts to train it to to good, will prove as vain as would be the effort to make the streams wholesome while the fountain remained poisonous. If the Head of the Church designed the churches to accomplish a conservative work of spiritual culture; if it was his purpose that plants of righteousness should be trained for ultimate transplantation into the paradise of God, then most assuredly he intended they should be composed of his true disciples, who alone are susceptible of such a training.

Again, the churches are centres of sacred influence, as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Their commission is to the world, proclaiming to its people salvation through Jesus Christ. They are the salt of the earth. The lights of the world. The epistles of Christ known and read of all men. To them is committed the great work, momentous in all its issues, of making known the unsearchable riches of Christ, and seeking the everlasting well-being of immortal souls. They publish the tidings of mercy, and their prayer is, "God be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us *that thy way may be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations.*" This is the aggressive mission of the churches in the name of Jesus upon the kingdom of Satan in the world. Their Master designs that they should effectively prosecute it.

But in order to the fulfillment of this design they must be composed of an aggregate of true disciples of Christ. Only such are "*light in the Lord,*" hence only *they can shine.* These alone are "the salt of the earth." The influence of no other is truly hallowed. Unless a false epistle of Christ is to be known and read of all men, the true disciples of Christ gathered into the Churches must constitute that epistle. They, as bearing their Master's image, his workmanship in them, the exhibition of the blessed effects of his grace, are living epistles of him to the people, which may be known and read of all men. In every view then, the design of Christ in the institution of churches, clearly includes only his people among their members; none other can improve as he would have them, none other can put forth influence and effort as he would have them. The *Lord* adds to the churches *of the saved.*

The *argument* for purity of communion is of a nature which throughout indicates its importance. Hence we notice as confirmatory of the view for which we are contending :

2. *The descriptions and declarations of Scripture.*

The passage descriptive of the early progress of the gospel, Acts 2, 47, has been already noticed as an explicit testimony. The epistles were addressed to the several churches, and their members are in those letters described as "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus," "called to be saints," "those who call on the name of the Lord." The entire narrative of the gathering and formation of churches recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles is confirmatory of this view. If there be any weight in Apostolic practice and example, then are we emphatically taught that the churches ought to be composed of those who are saved.

To this estimate of present duty it is however objected, that the primitive churches were not in fact pure. We read of schisms and contentions in them ; of evils in temper and evils in practice.

The correctness of this allegation is in part admitted, and the fact meets another objection, namely that with all care now, we have *not* in truth churches composed exclusively of believers. It is not pretended that either in early days or at present, any arrangements can keep out of the churches hypocrites and self deceivers, nor is it supposed that the true disciples in the churches are perfectly sanctified and freed from sin. But these admissions in no wise interfere with the correctness of the theory, that credible evidence of regeneration was in primitive days an essential qualification of church-membership. The apostle warns the subordinate builders, the pastors, against building upon the foundation which he had laid, "wood, hay, stubble," as well as "gold, silver and precious stones." When scandals arose in the churches, and "it must needs be that offences will come," the laws of Christ's house required the exercise of a godly discipline. Some were to be rebuked ; others were to be put away, "delivered over unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh," that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

It is objected that our Lord countenanced an opposite view in his teaching and practice. The parable of the tares and the wheat is adduced by the objector, in forgetfulness that the field in which they are found is *the World* and not *the Church*. It has been supposed to mean that "*both* must grow together *in the Church*" until the harvest." Now if this be so, (1) the *introduction* of the tares is expressly attributed to the *enemy* and therefore cannot

be adduced as an example; and then (2) the interpretation would absolutely prohibit *all discipline*. "Let them grow together until the harvest." The apostle's command, 1 Cor. 5, is incompatible with this theory, "put away from you that wicked person." Indeed our Lord's injunction "Let him be unto you a heathen man and a publican," is equally inconsistent; for the interpretation is "pluck them not up, let both grow together until the harvest." But if "the field be *the world*," as our Lord expressly states, all is simple and appropriate; it is a solemn *caveat* against persecution. Let not men's religion, or want of religion affect their civil rights. Let them dwell in God's world until the harvest. He will take care of his own honour, in the ultimate issue.

The point in our Lord's *practice* which is rested upon, relates to Judas Iscariot. But (1) He ever gave such credible evidence of piety, that his fellow disciples did not dream of his hypocrisy. Instead of suspecting him, they inquired, "Lord is it *I*?" And our Lord's omniscience has nothing to do with the argument; for as an *example* to the churches, that must be put out of the question. And then (2) it seems plain from the narrative that he went out before the institution of the supper of the Lord. He did not eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

It is further alleged that attempts at purity of communion promote pride and self-sufficiency. Now it must be admitted that through the corruption of the human heart, a good principle and practice may be abused so as to become, in given cases, of hurtful influence. Thus attendance upon the ordinances of the sanctuary may practically issue in hardening the sinner's heart. So may the professed disciple plume himself on being a member of a church which desires to receive none but true disciples into its communion, and having passed through the ordeal of examination and of solemn profession, may feel assured that all is right, and may go so far as even to despise others, but this is manifestly an abuse of what may nevertheless be a great good. The *tendency* of correct views of divine truth, and of godly church communion, is to humble the soul. If *saved*, it is by grace. If *graciously found*, the Lord sought. If *chosen*, it was merely of sovereign pleasure. And then the heart is known to be deceitful. The need and duty of constant *watchfulness* are felt. In fine, instead of pride and self-sufficiency, there are, as the natural effect of the grace of God in the heart, the reliance of the child, the humility of the penitent, the struggle of the combatant, and the vigilance of the endangered.

It will also be found on examination that all these objections would prove too much. They *actually require the admission of the ungodly into the churches*. The openly immoral and profligate must be pressed into the company. A line of demarcation does not exist at all, according to these objections. But the objectors shrink from this issue. From strictly indiscriminate communion they revolt. There is a natural feeling of incongruity which no theory can suppress. This is discoverable in the spontaneous exclamation of worldly men, when a professor of religion falls into flagrant evil, that he ought not to be a member of a Christian Church. The *need* of some line is intuitively felt. It may be asked, what line can you have other than credible evidence of true discipleship? Unless this be adopted we are involved in endless inconsistencies and difficulties.

In our judgment there is vast importance attached to this matter. Promiscuous church membership is perhaps *the bane* of the visible kingdom of Christ at this present time; it mingles the church and the world in an unhallowed union, and confounds those eternal distinctions which the Head of the Church would have ever visibly set forth. It moreover deceives and ruins immortal souls. No one can calculate the wide waste of ruin produced by it. In most cases it acts as a triple shield against the arrows of conviction, when God's word is faithfully and searchingly preached. It induces, with lamentable frequency, the cry of peace, peace, where there is no peace. Under its soporific influences men and women live and die self-deceived; supposing that they are disciples when they have no part nor lot in the matter, and entering the fearful realities of eternity with a lie in their right hand.

At the same time it is of almost equal moment to avoid "breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax." There is a rigidity of requirement sometimes which is alike unscriptural and hurtful. We have no authority for demanding large and comprehensive views of divine truth, nor the indications of a full-aged christianity, in order to membership. The flock of the Lord hath many lambs as well as full-grown sheep, and the fold is equally for *them*. There are *babes* in Christ who are *in the Church* to be fed "with the sincere milk of the word," as well as men whose requirement is "strong meat." Nor have we warrant for demanding the statement of an experience that involves precise dates and means of conversion. It not unfrequently happens that such things, when given, are false imaginings.

Nor have we any right to demand perfection of conduct and of character, or a thorough training in the ways of the Lord;—the church is the place to promote the one and achieve the other. Nor are we prepared to require any declaration of *certainty* that a hopeful conversion is *real*, or that unmistakeably the soul is *in* Christ justified and saved. There are no such ideas as these in the New Testament sketch of the primitive churches. But there is, throughout, the idea of membership which involves credible evidence of the renewal of the heart—of living faith in Christ—and of a course of life beginning the gospel.

It follows, however, that we are not to be surprised or stumbled if some who have seemed to run well and who were properly admitted into the Church, nevertheless fall back and dishonour their profession. When individuals thus fall or wander from their holy profession, it is by no means to be regarded as a proof that they ought *not* to have been received into the Church originally; it is on the contrary only an evidence of the deceitfulness of the heart and of the need, in the Church, of a godly discipline. The apostle in writing to the Corinthians concerning the incestuous man found in their fellowship, does not at all complain of them for having originally received him into their communion; he finds fault with them only *for retaining him there while walking in sin*. When the Apostle John declares concerning some, "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us," he gives no hint of wrong doing in their original introduction to the Church; he does not say "ye ought to have judged better and to have refused them." Unless we mistake there is a tendency in our minds to this extreme; being disappointed in some of whom we hoped well, we are tempted to keep out of the Church those who as babes in Christ ought to be cordially received. The true attitude of every Church is one of attraction rather than of repulsion. Its proper business is to allure back the wanderer, and in imitation of its divine master "to draw with cords of a man with bands of love." It must most carefully avoid rearing up a barrier in the path of the humble, contrite soul; its message is "come with us and we will do you good for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

Giving full weight to these views, we return to the point of a sound scriptural communion. This, it is repeated, is of unspeakable moment in every point of view. Three ele-

ments of that importance, which have been already hinted, may be briefly noticed as a summary and an appeal.

1. It is of vast importance to the personal welfare of members of the Churches.

Without careful attention to this matter, crowds are deceived to their eternal undoing. How many there are who because they are recognized members have no doubt of their present spiritual health and of their final safety, and yet they have no apprehension of the first principles of vital godliness. They are profoundly ignorant as a matter of experience, of the nature and evil of sin—of their personal guilt—and of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. The mischief, fearful as it is, does not terminate with them. The welfare of genuine disciples becomes unfavourably affected. The heterogenous mingling of the children of the world and of the children of God is analogous to the bringing of ice and heat into contact, the spiritual temperature is sensibly lowered; the atmosphere breathed is unfavourable to manly growth, energy, and holy enterprise, so that the whole Institution becomes sadly inefficient. The social principle is mighty in its influence for good or for evil. If a young christian begins his spiritual life in connection with a church of mingled elements, in which the spirit of the world predominates, the effect upon the formation of his character, and upon his future course, can hardly fail to be disastrous.

2. It is important also in order to the exercise of a right influence upon the world.

Our Lord makes this prominent in his figures of salt and light. "Ye are the salt of the earth," was his declaration to the disciples. "But if the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted, it is thenceforth good for nothing; it must be cast out and trodden under foot." "Ye are the light of the world." "But if the light that is in you be darkness;" if it be a false glare; if it be a deception; "how great is that darkness!" How ruinous to yourselves and others! If the Light-houses erected on the dangerous coast for guidance to voyagers prove treacherous and deceptive, how fearful is the devastation they produce! A false epistle of Christ is one of the worst of forgeries, and by far the most disastrous in its issues. The churches are cities set on a hill which *cannot* be hid. Whatever be their character they are seen, and their influence is felt. You cannot change the fact of their influence—they cannot exist without putting it forth. They ought to be centres of holy light whose beams radiating from them illumine all

around. They are designed to be nurseries of strong men and women, full of courage and zeal, armed in the panoply of truth and of faith, who do worthy deeds in the name of their Lord, being faithful, valiant and skilful. They are intended to be a spiritual, but mighty leaven, powerfully affecting and at length wholly leavening the mass. It is most clear, however, that they cannot be thus unless they are churches of the saints.

3. *It is also important in order to effective effort to advance throughout the world the Kingdom of the Redeemer.*

Gideon's three hundred picked men are far more potent in the Lord's army than would be three or thirty thousand promiscuously gathered. A small company of right hearted friends of Christ, full of faith and of prayer will do more to allure men from the sway of Satan and bring them to Jesus than could be effected by a host of nominal adherents, though they should make great noise in their movements and march amid pomp and parade. The matter is at once seen where a powerful appeal is addressed to an audience on behalf of immortal souls perishing, and of the glory of the Redeemer in their salvation. If the audience have no real godliness, no faith in Christ, no love for souls, no spiritual aspirations; not a single chord of sympathy is touched, and the speaker prophesieth in vain. There does not exist a fulcrum whereon to place the lever that would move them. His appeals fall pointless in such presence. But if his audience be such as a Church ought to be, the principles he advances meet with an earnest response in their convictions, and his appeals excite them to prompt and vigorous measures. It is such an assembly only that can be expected so to pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit, as to secure the boon without which the Kingdom of Christ makes no progress in the earth.

The best means of securing this important object have been hinted as we have proceeded. They are the faithful enlightened preaching of God's Word—diligent regard to credible evidence of regeneration in admission to the churches—mutual spiritual culture and watchfulness among the members of the churches—and the exercise of a godly discipline. In the mutual spiritual culture and watchfulness mentioned should be included giving prominence to the idea that church membership is of itself no evidence of a new heart and right spirit: our meaning is that appropriate instruction should often call attention to the fact that real godliness is a matter of the heart—that it has to do primarily with the relation between the soul and God—and that

nothing should satisfy one short of personal and present evidence of "repentance towards God, of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." It will be found, however, that one of the best securities which a Church can have against the introduction of improper members, is a high state of spirituality. It is when the contrast is the most striking between the Church and the world, that "of the rest durst no man join himself to them." While such a state of matters in a Church attracts the thoughtful and enquiring, it repels those whose hearts are given over to carnality. When a Church is filled with the Spirit of God and its services and its entire course are thereby animated, it has no attraction for the gay, the thoughtless, or the money or pleasure loving. They may jeer and scoff, but they will not be disposed to join.

In conclusion it may be observed, that while the polity of our churches is eminently fitted to foster and maintain purity of communion, there seems no good reason why adherents of other forms of ecclesiastical organization should not give themselves to the same course. We discover a facility and a harmony in our polity which some of them do not possess: but as it appears to us, they might and they ought all of them to restrict the fellowship of the churches to a communion of saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. As to ourselves let us be specially watchful in this matter. It is the great thing for which we as a body distinctively contend. It is of more importance than our testimony against union of Church and state, of moment as that is: it is of greater consequence than our time-honoured conflict for the suffrage of the Christian people within the churches, and the independence of the churches from all external control in the management of their affairs, good and righteous as that conflict is: in fine, it is next, in momentous interest, to a clear and faithful preaching of the gospel, if indeed it be not truly a part of such preaching, a practical part. Let it be ours then, brethren, to be faithful to this great principle of communion, cost what it may in individual cases or in general estimate, assured that it is when a church is "fair as the moon and clear as the sun" that it is terrible to the great foe of God and man "as an army with banners."

